

MINUTES
Virginia Board of Education Committee on the Lowest Performing School Systems
Tuesday, November 18, 2003

The Virginia Board of Education Committee on the Lowest Performing School Systems met in the Monroe Building, Rooms C and D, on Tuesday, November 18, 2003, from 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. Board members attending were President Thomas Jackson, Chairman Mark Emblidge, Mrs. Ruby Rogers, Mr. David Johnson, and Dr. Gary Jones. Superintendent Jo Lynne DeMary also attended. In the morning, the Board of Education participated in a panel discussion about characteristics of high performing school systems with superintendents and local school board members from the county school divisions of Brunswick, Chesterfield and Sussex, and the city school divisions of Norfolk and Richmond. Factors identified and discussed that affect school division performance included:

- Focus on student achievement
- Partnership between the superintendent and the school board
- Alignment and consistency of instruction with the curriculum based on the Standards of Learning
- High qualified and caring staff
- Diversified instructional strategies
- United front from teachers, the school board, principals, and the superintendent
- Accountability and performance measurement
- Understanding of the policy role of a school board versus day-to-day administration
- Capacity to recruit, train, and retain qualified teachers

In the afternoon, Mr. Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, reviewed the results of research examining three urban school districts to identify strategies and practices of school divisions that have been successful in raising student achievement, regardless of barriers. The study, *Foundations for Success, Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement*, named characteristics of school divisions that progressed faster than others with similar demographics. They included:

- Political cohesion and a common vision of student achievement
- Strong working relationships between the school board and the superintendent
- A strategic, focused vision of student performance and strategies that were sustained over a long period of time
- Goal setting, with objectives to be achieved within timeframes
- Accountability, beginning with the superintendent and extended to principals and teachers
- Curriculum aligned to state standards
- Professional development for staff based on defined needs

- Data analysis and driven decision making
- Explicit strategies for lowest performing schools
- Intensive instruction in reading and mathematics
- Systemic, comprehensive reform
- Measurement of progress

The study results less clearly identified the role of resources, preschool programs, parental involvement, governance structure, and the state. It was suggested that state intervention might be more of an influence for a dysfunctional school system.

The board members discussed the identification of low performing school systems and the possible strategies for state technical assistance, enforced accountability, and intervention. The Board of Education's responsibility and authority for ensuring compliance with the Standards of Quality was discussed. Dr. Cheri Magill, director of accreditation, outlined a proposed academic review process for school divisions. In the proposed review, teams appointed by the state would focus on a school system's curriculum alignment to the Standards of Learning, the use of instructional time and methods, use of data, staff training and improvement planning, student achievement, support of schools, and distribution of resources.